

# Castledown Community Primary School and Nursery

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	114474
<b>Local Authority</b>	East Sussex
<b>Inspection number</b>	378862
<b>Inspection dates</b>	9–10 November 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Wendy Simmons

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	383
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Margaret Pleasants
<b>Headteacher</b>	Neil Small
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 October 2008
<b>School address</b>	Priory Road Hastings TN34 2QT
<b>Telephone number</b>	01424 444046
<b>Fax number</b>	01424 426491
<b>Email address</b>	office@castledown.e-sussex.sch.uk

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<b>Age group</b>	3–11
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. In total, teaching and learning in 31 lessons or part-lessons was observed. Seventeen teachers were seen teaching along with teaching assistants. Meetings were held with the staff and members of the governing body. Parents' and carers' views were evaluated based on the 50 questionnaires received and from other school evidence. Discussions were held with groups of pupils in addition to the analysis of their 88 questionnaires. Staff returned 24 questionnaires. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at the improvement plans, policies, samples of pupils' work and assessment information. Child-protection and safeguarding information was scrutinised.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- If pupils' attainment is continuing to improve at the end of Year 6, including the effectiveness of actions to ensure that girls do as well as boys.
- How well reading and writing are developing, especially in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 1.
- The effectiveness of provision and outcomes for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities to accelerate their English skills. There was a particular focus on provision for girls who need specific help (at the school action level) because data indicate that boys, at this level, do better than girls.
- The accuracy of leaders' evaluations about the work of the school and the impact of this on the capacity to improve.

## Information about the school

Castledown is a larger than average primary school. Almost all pupils come from the immediate area surrounding the school. The vast majority of pupils come from White British backgrounds. A few pupils are from Asian, Black African or mixed heritage. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average; most of these pupils have behavioural or language and communication difficulties. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is much higher than average. The school's Early Years Foundation Stage is made up of a Nursery and two Reception classes.

Following the previous inspection, the headteacher left suddenly. The local authority arranged for an executive headteacher to lead the school while also leading her own outstanding school. A new acting headteacher also joined the school. Six months ago, the acting headteacher was appointed as permanent headteacher. During the last two years, there have been considerable staff changes, especially in the last year. The school has the Healthy School award.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

## Inspection judgements

**Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?****3****The school's capacity for sustained improvement****2**

## Main findings

Castledown is a satisfactory school which is quickly improving under the strong leadership and clear vision of the headteacher. Parents and carers are supportive of the school. One explained it like this: 'The head is very approachable and the school is improving all the time. The school has a happy positive atmosphere.'

The good support of the governing body and vision of the most senior leaders have enabled the school to take a close look at itself and take firm action to improve the quality of teaching. A local authority review in 2009 identified that the quality of teaching and learning needed improving urgently and this inspection confirms that these elements are now satisfactory. Some teaching and learning is good, although there is not enough for this to be good overall. A striking example of outstanding practice was evident in the superb arts and writing week's themed work, which pupils thoroughly enjoyed shortly before this inspection.

Staff work in a supportive and harmonious way so that there is a strong sense of teamwork. Expectations of what pupils can and should achieve have been raised as improvements in assessment and end-of-year target setting have become far more challenging. As a result, pupils are now doing much better by the end of Year 6 than was the case prior to 2009. Since 2009, pupils' attainment has risen from being exceptionally low and it is now average. Leaders are correctly focused on raising pupils' achievement from being satisfactory to good.

Leaders' good self-evaluation rightly focuses on the strengths and weaknesses of the school and this leads to effective improvement planning. For example, good work has begun on improving pupils' skills in reading and writing throughout the school. Nonetheless, the overall quality of teaching and learning in these aspects remains an improvement priority. Girls with more complex special educational needs and/or disabilities, who work at the school action level, do not do as well as boys who are at this level of need. In the school as a whole, such things as short-term targets are not yet clear enough for pupils to understand exactly how to improve quickly. Sometimes, lessons are not planned well enough for all ability groups and, despite other strengths, this means that progress is satisfactory rather than good.

Other strengths in the school include pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils like school. One put it like this and everyone agreed that 'The school has definitely improved and the new headteacher is great and we are doing better.' The good partnership with parents and others is contributing effectively to the

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improving outcomes for pupils.

A new Early Years Foundation Stage leader joined the school six weeks ago and has already been able to bring about significant improvements in provision. Although the Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory, leaders are correctly working to develop a range of provision to further strengthen aspects of risk assessment, increase outside learning opportunities and accelerate children's language and communication skills.

In 2009, exclusion rates were very high and pupils' behaviour had deteriorated to inadequate. Inspectors found behaviour in the school to be good overall and attendance rates have risen quickly so that they are now average. Improvements reflect high expectations, a close working partnership with parents and carers and new and effective procedures. Pupils say that they feel safe and parents agree. Considering the many areas of recent school improvement and accurate self-evaluation, the school demonstrates a good capacity to improve further.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

## **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and pupils' achievement to at least good by December 2012 by:
  - providing pupils with very specific short-term targets so that they understand exactly how to improve their skills as quickly as possible
  - ensuring that all lesson planning meets the needs of different groups of pupils according to their capabilities or needs
  - making sure that guided reading and phonics lessons are challenging
  - providing more consistent opportunities for pupils to edit and improve their work and write at length
  - ensuring that girls with special educational needs and/or disabilities make more rapid progress in their writing skills.
- Improve the quality of provision and outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage to at least good by:
  - making sure that risk-assessment systems are as systematic as possible
  - strengthening links between the Nursery and Reception classes
  - extending learning opportunities in the outside area
  - ensuring that children do as well as possible in gaining early reading and writing skills, especially extending children's skills in phonics.

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## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

**3**

Lessons seen, when combined with assessment information about pupils' progress, confirm that pupils' learning, progress and achievement are satisfactory in English and mathematics. Pupils enjoy school and parents and carers agree, as evident in comments, for example, 'My daughter bounces out of school each afternoon, full of all the exciting learning which has taken place.'

Inspectors looked carefully at reading and found that pupils are reading regularly for a range of interesting purposes. For example, there is a clear focus on improving the outcomes for pupils in the whole school, including Key Stage 1. Year 1 pupils were observed enjoying reading attractive National Geographic books, which helped them to learn about animals and the environment well, while in another Year 1 class, pupils busily found out about the skeleton. Years 3 and 5 read about William the Conqueror and novels about the Second World War. Opportunities were, however, missed to extract specific examples of text to extend pupils' skills further.

The sample of written work seen in books and lessons shows that good handwriting skills are beginning to be developed. Pupils explained how they work towards using fountain pens. Year 2 pupils were especially pleased to show inspectors their joined handwriting. The recent introduction of a new spelling scheme is helping pupils to do better. Although pupils sometimes write at length, they are not doing enough of this. Opportunities for pupils to edit and improve their work are patchy in the school. For example, in Year 2, when pupils wrote diaries about the story of Gracie, the next lesson focused on a different writing task rather than building on the work already started to develop descriptions. Whereas, in Year 6, pupils improved their ideas well when writing a play script for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and all other groups make the same progress as other pupils overall, although girls are not doing as well as boys in developing their writing skills. This is because, until very recently, there has not been rigorous enough analysis of data about the progress of pupils with differing special educational needs; leaders are now focused on improving this.

Although the school has the Healthy School award, pupils found it quite difficult explaining how well they adopt healthy lifestyles and this is why this is judged to be satisfactory rather than good. Pupils did, however, talk more enthusiastically about a recent visit by the British Heart Foundation. They enjoy dance club and sports activities. Pupils take an active part in eco club and care for chickens and the garden. There has been an improvement in the way that pupils from this school are seen in the community because their behaviour has significantly improved. Pupils enjoy good art exploration activities and know much about many different artists. For example, pupils know about 'drapery' sketching in the works by Leonardo da Vinci. Pupils know about the religious and cultural heritage of other pupils in the school. All pupils in Key Stage 2 learn a musical instrument. They have links with a school in Ghana and showed respect and sensitivity during a Remembrance Day assembly.

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*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	3
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

## How effective is the provision?

Teaching is more often satisfactory than good. Very occasionally outstanding teaching was observed during the inspection. Overall, teachers have secure knowledge of the subjects that they teach and they manage pupils' behaviour well, including effective help for pupils with very specific and complex behaviour difficulties. Resources are used in a suitable way to make learning meaningful to pupils. Lessons move on at a steady pace, although occasionally, teachers talk too much, which limits the time available for pupils to work independently. The quality of lesson planning is, however, very variable. Sometimes there is either a lack of challenge for the most able pupils or unsuitable activities for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The curriculum is under review, as leaders are working to help teachers to make more links between subjects and strengthen the development of basic skills. The arts week project shows very good links between subjects. For example, pupils explore infinity in both a scientific and creative way. The refocus on guided reading sessions is helping pupils to read with greater expression and understanding. Book provision has improved, with an attractive new library and well-organised reading books. The school is ensuring that phonics (linking letters with the sounds they make) is given a high profile but lessons tend to be for the whole class and not well enough organised

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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according to pupils' wide-ranging abilities. When pupils are reading with adults, during guided reading sessions, opportunities are sometimes missed to use and assess pupils' phonic skills. Sometimes guided reading activities are not challenging enough when pupils are working independently.

Some of the intervention support provided for pupils is of especially high quality and this is helping both boys and girls to make good progress in their basic reading skills, although the quality is not yet consistently good. The Every Child Counts help is accelerating progress in mathematics well but only impacts on a few pupils at the moment as training for other staff is still developing. Good links with outside agencies and general day-to-day care help pupils to feel safe and happy at school. Pupils are not clear enough about how to improve their skills quickly because they do not have clear targets to guide and support their development and this is an important factor in why the quality of care, guidance and support is satisfactory rather than good. Also, although boys and girls are receiving good support to catch up if they have fallen behind, girls are not given as much help as they need to improve their writing skills.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
The use of assessment to support learning	3
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>3</b>

## How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has high expectations and shares these well with his staff. Leaders' roles have developed well. Leaders have tackled past key areas of weakness well and have been effectively supported by the former executive headteacher. As a result, teaching is improving. Immense improvements have been made to the building and resources. Many procedures and policies have been completely reviewed. Staff expectations have increased and performance management has improved considerably in the last two years. Teamwork is stronger. The appointment of new staff, including several new leaders, is resulting in effective evaluation about the work of the school, as well as a clear vision for the future. This vision ensures that equal opportunities are provided for all pupils and any form of discrimination is not tolerated. Leaders are working to ensure that all groups of pupils do equally well. Leaders have started work to ensure that lesson planning is carefully modified for all abilities and to ensure that girls with special educational needs and/or disabilities do as well in writing as boys, although there is more to do to ensure that all pupils' achievement is good.

Safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory. The safe recruitment of staff complies fully with the requirements. Policies for safeguarding, including anti-bullying, are



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regularly reviewed and there are suitable links with the curriculum to ensure that children feel safe and can express their views. Case study information shows close links with different agencies to ensure that the pupils whose circumstances make them most vulnerable are protected.

Leaders know the local context well and incorporate links with the local church and the local area within topic work to help pupils gain an understanding of history and geography. Pupils benefit from links with a special school and are learning about the diversity of society. They take part in local events. Currently, there is little analysis of the impact of the work, as the coordinator has recently left. This is a factor in why community cohesion is satisfactory rather than good.

The governing body is fully and systematically involved in evaluating the school and planning developments. In the last two years, many new governors have been appointed and they have taken firm action to get into more classes to find out about the work of the school. Relationships with staff are constructive and they show determination in challenging and supporting the school to tackle weaknesses and so bring about necessary improvements. The views of parents, carers and pupils are now sought regularly and are used to inform improvement plans well.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>3</b>

**Early Years Foundation Stage**

Children start school in the Nursery often showing skills and knowledge that are well below expected levels, especially in their language, communication and social skills.

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They make good progress in their personal, social and emotional development. This means that they show confidence and can concentrate and behave well. Children are happy, settled and know how to work with others. Children make evident progress in developing their speaking skills but their progress is too slow in gaining early reading and writing skills. This includes their progress in learning letters and sounds (phonics). The most-able children are not consistently challenged in this element in particular. Overall, progress in other aspects of the curriculum is sound. Children enter Year 1 with skills at lower than average levels but their achievement is satisfactory given their starting points, reflecting the quality of teaching and provision overall.

Children enjoy selecting activities for themselves, although adults do not help them to review their learning effectively at the end of activities. Staff have a sound knowledge of how the youngest children learn and develop, although leaders recognise that some teaching assistants need further training in this. A reasonable range of teaching methods are used but sometimes planning misses the chance to make the most of outside learning. For example, in Reception, when children were learning 'in, out, under, over and through' in a class lesson, this was not followed through in outside activities. Opportunities are not always seized upon spontaneously to enrich and extend skills.

Good practice was seen in the Nursery as adults demonstrate and model activities well, which invites children to take part in learning in an exciting way. For example, when having fun with the dough, they learnt new words to explain the texture as it altered with the addition of more water. When outside, they enjoyed acting out the Owl Story, hunting for hedgehogs in the tunnels and flying around, which made a significant contribution to children's language development.

Children enjoy school. Staff take care of children in a kind and sensitive way. Children are safe and secure. Welfare arrangements are satisfactory but risk assessments are not always consistently as detailed as they could be. For example, children thoroughly enjoy having a class rabbit, which contributes much to their emotional development. However, the risk assessments for having pets or other animals are very general and not specific enough to this setting. Although there have been very recent checks on equipment and other resources, it was not a regular enough feature of risk assessment in the past; as such records over time are sparse. The new leader is enthusiastically working to improve all aspects of provision in the drive to make the outcomes good in the future. Each team works well together but there is not a seamless link between Nursery and Reception, especially for planning and assessment.

*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

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The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
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## Views of parents and carers

The proportion of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire was lower than average. They feel positive about the school and note a marked improvement in recent years. As one explained, 'The school has improved immensely in the last year and a half in all aspects.' Inspectors endorse these positive views. A very few parents and carers noted that pupils occasionally still use offensive language in the playground. Inspectors found pupils' behaviour to be good and pupils keenly told inspectors, 'There is no more name calling, pushing or fighting as pupils have been helped to grow up and behave.' Almost all parents and carers feel that their suggestions and concerns are listened to and that they know about their children's progress. Inspectors confirm that there are clear and accessible channels for parents and carers to communicate with the school, which the school actively encourages them to use. Leaders are working continuously to improve and have already developed a good partnership with parents and carers.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Castledown Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 50 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	30	60	18	36	2	4	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	33	66	17	34	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	34	68	14	28	2	4	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	30	60	19	38	1	2	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	33	66	16	32	1	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	31	62	19	38	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	24	48	26	52	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	18	36	25	50	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	29	58	18	36	1	2	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	18	36	22	44	3	6	1	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	23	46	24	48	1	2	1	2
The school is led and managed effectively	22	44	27	54	1	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	29	58	20	40	1	2	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

### Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li> <li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li> <li>■ The quality of teaching.</li> <li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li> <li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li> </ul>
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



11 November 2011

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of Castledown Community Primary School and Nursery,  
Hastings TN34 3QT**

Thank you so much for telling us about your school. It was a pleasure to meet you. We have found that you go to a satisfactory school. Like you, we agree that the school is a happy place. Your behaviour has improved considerably, so that it is now good overall. We also found that your attendance is much higher than it was. Congratulations for these very important improvements; please keep them up!

Teaching is satisfactory and sometimes good and this means that you make steady progress. Your spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. For example, we particularly enjoyed seeing your outstanding arts and writing project. We would like you to do more of this quality writing in the future. We are pleased to know that you are doing more music and work which helps you to learn about different beliefs and the lives of other people. You enjoy school and value the work that has been done to improve your school. As one of you said, 'It's definitely improving' and we agree. Leaders, especially your headteacher and governors, have high expectations for you and want to do the very best for you. We have asked everyone to work hard on improving the following things.

- Make teaching and learning at least good. This will mean that teachers will be giving you targets to help you to learn new things step by step. Teachers will also make sure that they plan activities carefully for those who learn quickly and for those who need more help. We know that you are already doing guided reading and phonics but we want these activities to be as challenging as possible. We want teachers to help you to do longer pieces of writing. A few girls also need more individual help with their writing.
- Make sure that children in the Nursery and Reception classes do as well as possible in reading and writing and develop their learning in the outside area. The adults are correctly working to make more links between Nursery and Reception classes and to make safety checks even better.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Simmons  
Lead inspector

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